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ABSTRACT

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1998, students in more than 400 schools of journalism around the world were invited to write articles or take photographs that illustrate the right to education. This magazine features the 18 winning articles and photographs that provide a vivid picture of the wide gap between the right to education and the reality. The articles report on the educational needs and aspirations of slum dwellers in Uganda, on the deplorable conditions of state schools in the post-perestroika Russian Federation, on the battle against illiteracy in India, on the consequences of cost-sharing policies in Kenya, and on the harsh realities of street children in Mexico. Each article contains a table of information about the individual country, including geographical placement, population, life expectancy, population growth rate, Gross National Product (GNP) per capita, illiteracy rate, public expenditure on education, and the amount of geographical area in kilometers. (LB/Author)

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April 1999 / Winning submissions of the 1998 International Journalism Contest on the Right to Education

THE INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATIVE FORUM ON EDUCATION FOR ALL

Education a Right or a Privilege?

Student journalists report on the right to education worldwide

ED 430 905

SO 030 988

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Article 26

of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights

➜ Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

➜ Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

➜ Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

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Editorial co-ordination: Anne Müller Editorial consultants: Donald Amour, Jane Marshall Graphic design: atelier takavoir Print: CL2

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Editorials

The luxury of education

When the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was celebrated in 1998, the right to education (Article 26 of the Declaration) was often mentioned. Human rights experts, United Nations officials and decision-makers underlined that education is not only a human right, it is also a prerequisite for the development of society, as well as of the individual. Without it, the aims of the Universal Declaration simply cannot be achieved.

Yet education continues to be a privilege rather than a right. In the world today, nearly 1 billion people are illiterate, and 84 million children are out of school. In addition, hundreds of millions of children who are in school do not receive a quality education, and they often repeat classes and drop out altogether.

When the International Consultative Forum on Education for All launched the International Journalism Contest on the Right to Education in May 1998, we wanted to find out how adults and children experience the right to education. Why it is important to go to school? How well are schools able to teach children what they need to know to find work and be competent parents and citizens? What are the working conditions of teachers? Et cetera.

But we did not want another study or fine report on the matter. We wanted to involve the opinion-makers of tomorrow and we therefore invited students in more than 400 schools of journalism around the world to write articles or take photographs to illustrate these questions.

As the following pages reveal, the students' submissions give a vivid picture of the wide gap between reality and the right to education. It is not an exhaustive description of the right to education in the world today, but it provides us with a fresh and unedited portrait of the state of basic education. It is sad, touching but most of all, it shows the incredible courage and wit of men, women and children who survive despite poor and difficult situations.

Urgent action is required to improve and enhance their lives. Only by improving their living conditions and giving them access to basic education can we hope to create a peaceful world and a healthy and harmonious way of life.

The time is not for fine words but for action. Education is still a luxury reserved for the few in too many countries. ■

Svein Osttveit
Executive Secretary
International Consultative Forum on Education for All

Children's rights, adults' duties

People identify the right to education easily and immediately with access to school, as the best entries by students of journalism published in this magazine illustrate. Indeed, one does not need to have studied the text of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, to which the International Journalism Contest was dedicated, to understand how important it is for children to gain access to school and how devastating it is to be doomed to lifelong illiteracy. This translates into condemnation to poverty, which routinely carries over to the next generation.

Children understand this, as the many interviews on these pages reveal. Children are not simply adults-to-be, whose ideas can be discarded as immature, but rather individuals with rights. Even if none of the children interviewed attended lectures on the meaning and implications of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the ease with which the right to education is understood testifies to the global validity of basic human rights. If the numerous children deprived of access to school had a say in budgetary allocations, indubitably they would have made sure that schools were a priority so that all children would get a place in school.

Education is not a luxury but a right and thus should not constitute a privilege. Children should have the first call upon available resources and their education should be given priority. The problem is, however, that children obtain the right to vote and to be elected to parliament after they become adults, and those who benefited from schooling are the most likely to become elected and to decide on budgetary allocations.

As adults, we owe children at least an opportunity to go to school. The rights of the child cannot be realized unless we recognize our duties as adults. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights states in clear terms that everybody has duties, but we tend to disregard our duties towards children unless reminded by children's voices that their rights translate into our duties.

The inter-generational dimensions of human rights become glaringly obvious when we consider where most children deprived of access to school are. Half of Africa's population are children. How will this youthful population and the young African states secure sufficient resources to enable all children to go to school? Precisely for this reason, human rights were conceptualized as universal from the very establishment of the United Nations. If rights are confined to national borders, they are no longer human rights but only citizens' rights, and the solidarity links that tie humanity weaken and threaten to disappear. Student journalists and their even younger interviewees remind us in the following pages that we have a huge unpaid debt and that we are neglecting our duties towards the next generations. ■

Prof. Dr Katarina Tomaševski
United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education

High hopes but

Children and adults in the slums of Kampala long for an education, but while many have missed out they still have their dreams for the future. Samali T. Nyanzi of the Uganda Management Institute meets some of them.

Five minutes' walk from Kampala City is the sprawling Kisenyi slum. As I walked along the dirty lanes, jumping over sewers, I noticed there were more girls than boys playing and running around that Monday.

I asked the girls why they were not at school. Amused, they answered: "No school fees!" Ten-year-old Maria told me she was the eldest of seven children and her parents did not have enough money to feed them; how then could they send them to school? Poverty was the reason many of these girls were denied their right to education.

"Maria, do you think it is important to go to school?"

"I think it is important because one can learn to read and write and become a nun!"

I could not help laughing. "Why a nun?" Maria told me she was Catholic and greatly admired the nuns at her church. Her lifetime dream was to be a nun. "I am a quick learner," she said and could recite the whole rosary for me: "Hail Mary Amen!" But how could she become a nun when she did not know how to read and write?

Farida said she was the only girl in her family, segregated by her parents who had sent her four brothers to school. She had been told it was more beneficial to send boys to school than girls. She also knew that when she became 15, only three years from now, she would be married off to a Muslim man. In the name of religion, Farida would be denied the right to education.

"Farida, do you think it is important to go to school?"

"It is important to me because I have been told there is a Muslim University."

"Who told you?"

"I have a cousin who is studying there. She can speak Arabic and English and read the Koran all by herself. I would learn all that and become a great teacher."

Surviving by hard work

I was astonished. Instead of the little hooligans lacking in morals one would expect to find in such a slummy area, here were children from strongly religious backgrounds aspiring to be worthy and useful citizens.

Further on I came across a group of young boys. I asked the same question and received the same answer: "No school fees." Some of them said their parents were uneducated and saw no reason why they should send their children to school. They had survived by hard work and their wits, and believed their children should follow in their footsteps. Illiteracy and tradition were going to ruin these boys' futures.

I asked one who appeared to be the group leader, "Can you please tell me why it is important to go to school?"

"Although I don't go to school, it is important because you can become 'somebody'. People wouldn't look down on you because you don't know how to read and write."

I walked on, to a house that stood out from the others, and asked the woman sitting by the door whether she had any children. She told me she was a housewife with three children all at school. Her husband had dropped out but he valued education. As a taxi driver he earned just enough to send the children to an inexpensive school nearby. She added that Uganda's Universal Primary Education Programme of 1997 had lightened the burden of school fees for them.

However, she also explained that there were few government schools and it was not easy to get a place. Admission interviews were usually difficult and not many children passed them. Even those who succeeded faced other obstacles. If, for example, parents could not afford the school fees, the vacancy was forfeited. Corruption was mentioned as another shortcoming, with school heads demanding bribes, which some parents cannot afford.

Ramshackle schools

I followed the sound of young children's voices. Not far away was a house made of mud and old sheets of iron, with neither windows nor doors. Known as the 'church school', it had five rooms and catered for orphans. I noticed a girl who was bigger than her classmates. She seemed unsure when she had lost her parents, and eventually revealed that she was not a 'real' orphan but this was the only way she could be educated. She had lost her mother when young, and her drunkard father had remarried. She had run away and lived with an old grandmother who had got her a place here.

I asked Abayo: "Why is it important to go to school?"

"Because I want to have a bright future. I will stay at school even though the small children make fun of me because I am older."

The children in Kisenyi slum surprised me. Despite their environment, most of the ones I talked to understood that it was important to go to school.

Some of the schools I visited in Kisenyi were in an appalling condition. The old iron sheets of the church school have big gaping holes. When it rains water leaks through, it becomes cold and damp and classes are disrupted. There are not enough benches and most children sit on mats. Only two toilets cater for both teachers and the children, with no distinction between

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no education

1st prize for best article

Ladies and Gents. Hygiene is poor. Posho and beans are their daily sustenance, with porridge for midmorning break.

Conditions in the private schools are much better than the government-sponsored or self-help project schools like the church school. Buildings are in a better shape, the food is well cooked and varied for teachers and pupils. Hygiene is maintained. But they are overcrowded, especially in the lower classes. Eighty students occupy a room intended for forty. Individual pupil care is impossible, with a teacher/student ratio of one to eighty.

As I talked to teachers and students, I noted the lack of career guidance. The aim is to pass exams and schools teach students knowledge, not practical skills. A student might be talented in art, but that talent will not be developed for creating or finding work. I thought of the Chinese proverb: "Teach a man to fish and he will feed himself for the rest of his life."

I asked teachers how well they could teach pupils to be competent parents and most answered with a shake of their heads. One of them quoted an old saying: "A child belongs to everybody," which is unfortunately no longer true. Though teachers try hard to impart morality, they cannot do it alone. Children learn by example and parents also have a part to play, together with society as a whole. But most parents are too busy to concern themselves with such matters and think paying school fees is enough. The teachers complained that parents rarely visited the school even though they were invited to discuss their children's progress.

Teachers at downtown private schools described their conditions as "average". Salaries are paid on time and it is a 'fair' package compared with that of teachers at government schools. They supplement their salaries by teaching in other schools during their free time and by marking exams. Meals are provided, as are transport allowances and medical care, though this does not cover their families. Their greatest problem is overcrowded classes, but being paid a living wage keeps up their morale.

'Overgrown children'

Continuing my walk through Kisenyi I saw many youths standing around idle. The chairman of the local council told me they were not at school because there was no money to cater for 'overgrown children'. I asked him about the government's adult literacy programme.

"I have only heard about it. I have not seen anybody interested in starting to learn at such a late stage, although there could be a few here and there."

I came across a number of garages and carpentry and welding workshops. One youth, Matia, told me he had missed school because of the fees. He had asked the owner of the carpentry workshop to take him on as an apprentice as he had neither the money nor qualifications to join a technical school. His ambition was to become an expert in this field and set up his own carpentry workshop. "Once I'm skilled, I'll get a job and be able to earn my daily bread," he said.

Hajati Jalia is a widow and illiterate. She borrowed money from the women's self-help project to rear chickens, and sells them and the eggs for a living. When I asked how she manages her business without being cheated, she said: "I have learnt through experience, and my eldest son, who is in school, helps me keep my accounts in order."

Her dream "is to live long enough to educate my children. I have already seen the importance of education when my son reads and does my accounts."

Illiteracy limits one's vision

"Five hundred... five hundred only for children's wear!" Kafeero was shouting as loud as he could to attract customers. I asked him how much profit he got from selling second-hand clothes and he told me it was not much, but he had no alternative. He regretted not going to school, although his father had paid fees for him. He had misused his chance to have an educ tion and must now live with the unpalatable consequences. His ambition was to raise enough capital to build a small retail shop.

Josephine is illiterate and has only one leg. She cooks and sells samosas for a living and despises those who beg. "Disability is not inability," she told me. "I thank God for my hands. I am earning, and rent a two-roomed house from my small income."

Her hope for the future is "to save enough money to buy a plastic leg from Mulago orthopaedic department. When I get it I will be able to move faster and expand my area of operation. I will supply more shops with samosas."

We should all have the right to education. Being illiterate is a serious handicap, limiting one's vision and holding back those with intelligence. It stunts economic development. As we approach the next millennium, we should acquire practical skills as well as education, which will reduce unemployment at all levels. We should put our hands to good use. If the disabled can work, why not everyone? Like the Chinese, let us all learn how to fish. ■

Geographical situation:
Eastern Africa

Area:
241,038 km²

Population:
20.8 million

Life expectancy:
41 years

Population growth rate:
2.9% per year

GNP per capita:
US$240

Illiteracy rate:
38.2%

Public expenditure on education:
15% of total government expenditure

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The Russian Federation has always been famous for its education system. But today, state schools are in a deplorable condition and good education has become a luxury, reports Karina Vladimirovna Chupina of St. Petersburg State University.

Education in a

Geographical situation: Europe-Asia
Area: 17,075,400 km²
Population: 147.7 million
Life expectancy: 64 years
Population growth rate: 0.4% per year
GNP per capita: US$2240
Illiteracy rate: 0.5%
Public expenditure on education: 9.6% of total government expenditure

In the Russian Federation, in accordance with the law, free education is available to everyone. However, recently its quality in different schools has varied a lot. Therefore, far-sighted parents try to put their children almost from the cradle into early development groups requiring payment, where they learn reading, foreign languages and even ballroom dancing. After such infant prodigy preparation, they are able to pass entrance examinations in private schools.

Post-perestroika children in times of unemployment and economic crisis understand the value of education and of a good command of languages for their future career. A foreign language can be learnt well only in advanced schools or through private coaching. In state schools, physics, biology and especially languages have sometimes not been taught for years because the best teachers leave for jobs with well-off companies.

Meagre school budgets

Given the powerful educational potential, state schools are in a deplorable condition. They have no budget resources for the purchase of desks and chairs, and the chemistry and physics laboratory equipment consists of real antiques dating from the Second World War. Despite so-called free education, schools are obliged to collect money from pupils for textbooks, for a school janitor, to paint the walls and even for lavatory repairs.

Only a few schools have up-to-date computers, provided at the expense of sponsors. The remaining schools, at best, possess only decrepit ones, unfit for use in modern computer programs. To acquire a popular profession, young people attend expensive courses in computer use, as well as accounting, real estate and foreign language courses. The number of students attending evening classes has dropped because many favour external courses or courses requiring payment.

Art and music school clubs have disappeared or now require unaffordable payment, and school gymnasia have been leased out to other users. (Nevertheless there remains in the Russian Federation a wonderful system of state art and music schools that train future professionals and winners of international contests.) A tradition of providing free extra classes to students lagging behind has been replaced by legalized commercial coaching.

Today's most prestigious occupations are lawyer, banker or doctor. The Russian Federation's education system is distinguished by its wide range of subjects, but pupils do not have much choice and they claim that many subjects are not important for their future careers.

Schools do not teach pupils to communicate, don't prepare them for life's social hardships at all, and there is no training in psychology and communication. Hence, drugs and early sex are widespread, especially in a time of crisis.

General literacy at stake

The Russian Federation has always been famous for its general literacy, which is now at stake. As a result of incautious reforms, more and more children have become homeless. These children, often drug addicts and

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time of crisis

the offspring of alcoholic parents, drop out of school. Girls from a children's home confessed to me in an interview that they were happy to get an opportunity to study again after life in basements. It's essential they also study in vocational workshops and earn wages. Homeless girls' dreams of obtaining their own dwelling do not correspond to their possibilities. It is worth noting that many orphanages, and Sunday and parish schools, have become feasible thanks to international funds and foreign churches.

Plight of disabled

Sadly, opportunities for self-education have diminished. Interest groups have become commercial and unattainable, the premises of palaces of culture are now leased out to firms. I recall that, in the past, pupils would have free excursions and go to the theatre.

Today, all this is a luxury, as is a good education, and an opening night at the theatre is more often an occasion for enhancing one's prestige. Trade unions that used to arrange cultural events are cash-starved. There is some consolation that there are still free libraries, which arrange concerts and international exhibitions.

The lack of an economic base hinders implementation of new laws, including ones on education promulgated to implement the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, that remain on paper only. This particularly affects the education and social security of disabled persons. They have to overcome many challenges to get a basic education. I was a child with hearing difficulties.

My family put me into a mass school but this caused great difficulties. Such schools are unwilling to accept the disabled because teachers do not receive any special income supplement for teaching disabled pupils, unlike teachers in specialized schools. For this reason I was refused extra lessons to which I was entitled by law. Owing to lack of assistance and technical equipment, many deaf pupils are pressured into moving to specialized schools where educational standards are lower and the equipment dilapidated, but where communication and psychological support are better.

Another example is that parents who want and have the right to educate their children at home do not receive the compensation to which they are entitled by Russian law.

In general, budgets are continuously reduced and commercialization of educational institutions increases. You do not have to strain yourself any longer; you can simply buy a fake diploma. Meanwhile, the police on the street use their batons to disperse teachers and students demonstrating for back payment of salaries and for student grants that have been promised but not provided.

The most sought-after school in the Russian Federation today is the school of survival and the acquisition of professional skills. A capability for lifelong learning and the use of information skills ensures that a person will not be excluded from today's information society. Using journalism as an educational tool we can share our knowledge with others and contribute to fulfilling the Right to Education. ■

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Winning photographs

Ademola Idowu
Nigeria

Luke Njeru Nyaga
Kenya

Josefina Caballero
Puerto Rico

Mariz Shela Tito
The Philippines

1st **N.C. Krishna Priya**
India

Alexej Kompanijchenko
The Russian Federation

Alex Diang'a
Kenya

Olja Stojanova
Bulgaria

Peter K. Ndirangu
Kenya

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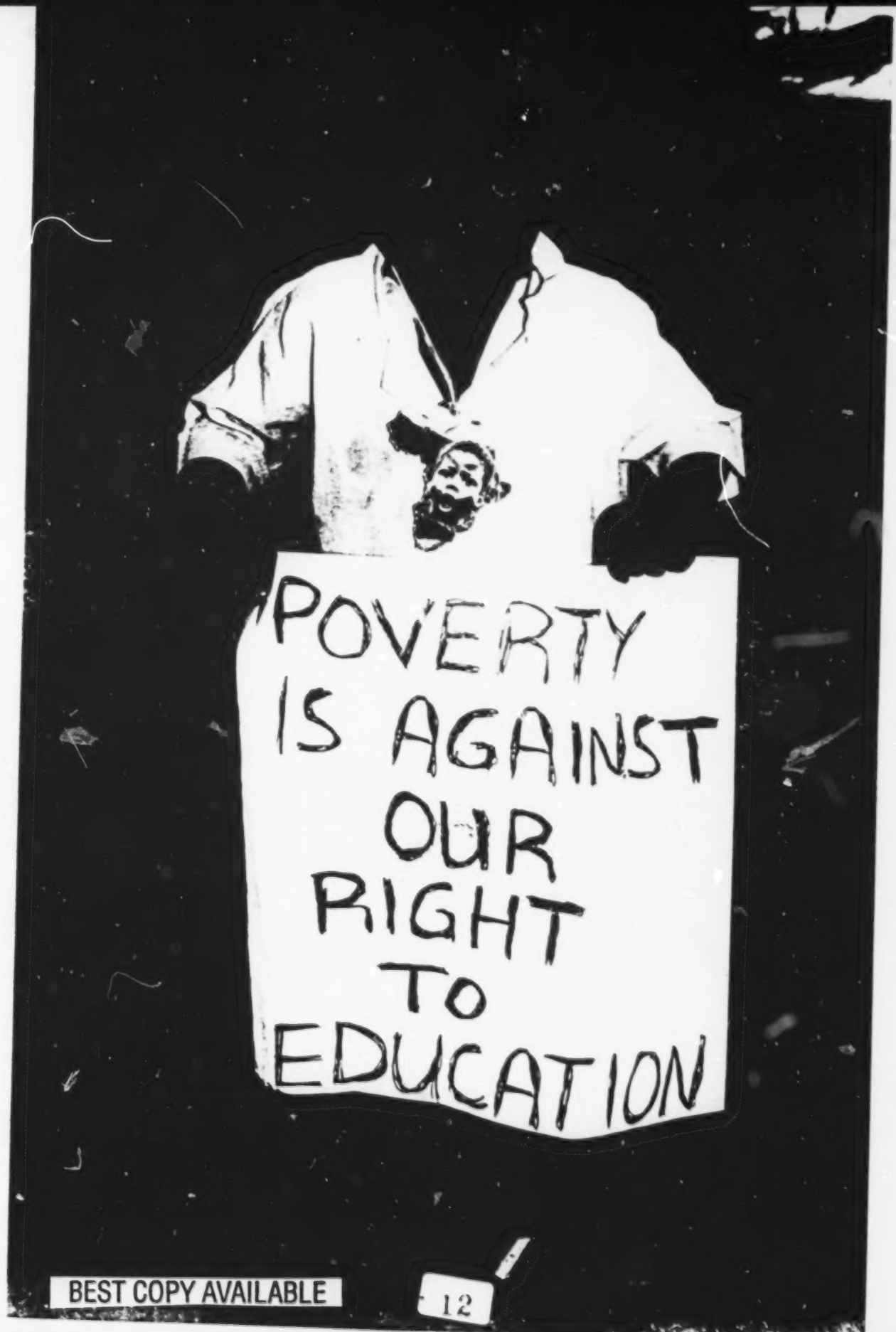

Ademola Idowu I Nigeria I Nigéria

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Luke Njeru Nyaga | Kenya

Josefina Caballero | Puerto Rico

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Mariz Shela Tito | The Philippines | Philippines

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Alex Diang'a | Kenya

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Peter K. Ndirangu I Kenya

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Surviving on the streets

Children living on the streets are a major problem in many countries in Latin America. Heidy Anette Rueckert de Hoyos and Alan Christian de la Rosa Palacio of the University of Monterrey report on Juanillo, 9, who would love to go to school if given the chance.

Mexico

Geographical situation:
Latin America
Area:
1,958,201 km²
Population:
94 million
Life expectancy:
73 years
Population growth rate:
1.9% per year
GNP per capita:
US$3320
Illiteracy rate:
10.4%
Public expenditure on education:
26% of total government expenditure

Juan López Rodríguez, or Juanillo as he likes to call himself, is only 9 years old. He is little, has pearly coloured skin and no teeth. Every morning at 7 o'clock he is wakened up not by an alarm clock but by the sound of passing cars. Juanillo starts immediately to dress himself, which doesn't take much time as he puts on the same clothes every day. What takes time, however, is to paint his face as a clown. Then, without eating breakfast, he takes the first bus that passes in front of him.

When Juanillo sings songs and tells jokes to the bus passengers, he is neither shy nor ashamed. He gives the best of himself, gesticulating and talking gracefully, because he knows that a good performance means generous passengers and he will get enough money to buy his bread for breakfast.

Juanillo lives in Nuevo León, situated at the border between Mexico and the United States. And he is only one example of the thousands of Mexican children (3,1 per cent of all children) who do not go to school. Although Nuevo León is considered to be one of the most progressive states in Mexico from an educational point of view, the problem of street children is also present here. According to the Secretary of Public Education, thousands of children are out of school.

Giving up school

Although the Mexican government guarantees nine years of free education, cultural and socio-economic problems oblige 8.8 per cent of secondary school students in Mexico to abandon their studies and start work. In Nuevo León, the percentage of secondary students who give up school is about 4.7 per cent.

But why do children like Juanillo not have the privilege of education? Rosa Nelly Meza Mendoza, responsible for a programme entitled Minors in Special Difficult Circumstances (MECED), explains that the majority of children who abandon school work in the streets. "Only 46 per cent of the children who work in the streets go to school and their results in school are poor. The other 54 per cent give up school altogether," she says.

The MECED programme exists in six towns and involves clubhouses where 250 street children can meet and several computer laboratories where they learn maths and Spanish.

According to the Centre of Integrated Development of the Family, 98 per cent of the children who work between four and eight hours a day in the streets have a home.

Forced to leave home

However, this is not the case of Juanillo. He started to live in the streets three months ago and he does not have the intention to go back home. He prefers to confront life in the streets rather than staying at home where he suffered physical and mental damage. "I'll not go back home; my home now is the streets," he says.

"The reasons why these children abandon their homes and go to live on the streets are numerous," says Jaime Cárdenas Vidaurri, co-ordinator of information at the National Human Rights Commission of Nuevo León. "In some cases, their parents, having psychological problems or substance abuse, force their children to leave their home. In other cases, it is the children themselves who decide to leave. In any case, if these children go to school they have poor results."

Some children who leave home get involved in programmes such as MECED after having been intercepted by the police or the social services. While the family background of the children is being investigated, they receive meals, clothes, a medical evaluation, psychological assistance and basic education.

But what is going to happen to Juanillo, living between pollution, danger and night shadows? "A street child lives in an adult world and loses his or her childhood precociously," underlines Jesús Castillo López, a psychologist and teacher in sociology at the University of Chicago.

Maybe Juanillo will be lucky and win one of the 200 scholarships that MECED offers to street children so that they can finish primary school. But even if he does, there will be many other children like him, who, one day, will make society suffer for the consequences of not having given them the right to education. ■

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Full literacy — still a distant dream

India has no shortage of schools, though not all of them are accessible and illiteracy and drop-out rates are high. Hopes rest in new programmes of non-formal schooling, vocational training and adult education, reports Surya Malik of the Lady Shri Ram College in New Delhi.

With a twinkle in his eyes Ankit, a Grade 2 pupil of a school in Delhi, says: "I wish to become a pilot." He is like any other youngster having his share of dreams. Ankit's mother later says that he will soon be abandoning his studies to help earn a living for his family. His family includes an alcoholic father, his mother and four younger siblings.

Shiela, a tea stall owner in Bombay, remarks ruefully: "My 8-year-old daughter doesn't go to school and never will. Schools are meant only for the rich."

Salim, aged 10, a Grade 3 student in a primary school in Bihar, will leave school in another couple of months. He complains there are no teachers, no blackboards, and not even a proper roof on his school. Little does he know that his father plans to make him work as a bonded labourer in a carpet weaving factory.

The circumstances differ and the reasons vary. But the underlying fact remains that the constitutional directive providing entitlement to free and compulsory education to all children under 14 remains a distant dream in India. The current literacy rate in India is 48 per cent, though it has the second largest schooling system in the world. It has been estimated that it will be home to the largest number of illiterate people in the world by the turn of the century. One question nagging the minds of all is why innumerable plans and schemes have failed to achieve 100 per cent literacy in this land of Saraswati, the deity of knowledge.

Lack of equipment

According to the Ministry of Human Resource Development, there is no shortage of schools in India. At least one primary school is located within a range of three kilometres. But what it fails to realize is that not all these schools are accessible to every child expected to go to school. Muralidharan, a fisherman in Kayipadi, a village in Kerala, recalls: "Children of our village were never sent to school even though the nearest was less than two kilometres away. This was because it meant crossing a river, a railway line and a highway." Now there is a plan to start a school in the village itself.

The planners take pride in providing a proper building for each school. Unfortunately, provision for the accompanying infrastructure is generally deficient. As a result, only one in five schools has toilet facilities, 17 per cent are provided with chalk, 30 per cent with dusters and only 25 per cent are equipped with libraries. Only about 7 per cent of the teachers undergo in-service training. Parvati Devi, a villager of Rajasthan, says wistfully: "The school in our village is a coeducational one. It has only male teachers and no separate toilets for girls and boys. I do not find this school safe for my daughter."

Yet another problem is the high drop-out rate. It is calculated that out of every three children enrolled in Grade 1, two leave school before reaching Grade 3. This is largely due to poverty and unplanned families. Geeta Devi, a labourer, wonders: "I have six children, all of whom lend a helping hand to raise money for a square meal. When on earth do they have time to study?"

The government has come up with a scheme providing midday meals and this idea does seem to satisfy mothers. However, it has yet to reach remote areas of the country.

Schooling in condensed form

The lack of interest in education is also attributed to the elitist curricula, which fail to attract the poor. To combat this problem, a non-formal system of education has been introduced in which out-of-school children, whether non starters or drop-outs, are offered primary-level courses in a condensed form. Vocational training is also being provided at some schools to make them more popular. And last, adult education is being given priority to ensure literacy for the whole family.

A recent attempt by the National Social Service Programme, a voluntary scheme under which illiterate people are taught to read, write and calculate, has raised a ray of hope towards achieving a higher literacy rate. Ghanshyam Lal, a 52-year-old resident of Zamroodpur village, gives his impressions: "I have a wonderful teacher in Tanushree. Apart from teaching me Hindi and maths, she is an understanding friend. She enlightens me about the functioning of the banks, saving schemes and the rights and duties of a good citizen."

India is gradually making better use of its human resources and striving to improve the economic and social conditions of its people. But much still needs to be done to make the following lines of the great Indian poet Rabindra Nath Tagore come true:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high; Where knowledge is free... ■

India

Geographical situation: South Asia
Area: 3,287,590 km²
Population: 960 million
Life expectancy: 62 years
Population growth rate: 1.9% per year
GNP per capita: US$340
Illiteracy rate: 48%
Public expenditure on education: 12.1% of total government expenditure

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EDUCATING THE LESS FORTUNATE

Unable to afford the formal system of education, disadvantaged parents in the slums of Nairobi are striving to educate their children through non-formal education programmes, reports Alex Diang'a of the University of Nairobi.

The poorly lit room is filled with an atmosphere of silent concentration as contented pupils, eager to learn, listen attentively to their teacher, a slender, middle-aged village woman.

"Before I came here I could not read or write," says 12-year-old Jackline Achieng of Highridge Non-formal School at Korogocho village, 15 kilometres northeast of Nairobi and a beneficiary of the Non-Formal Education Programme launched by Action Aid Kenya in 1992.

Korogocho is one of the twenty sprawling slums found around Nairobi. Made up of eight villages, it constitutes more than a quarter of the population in a metropolis estimated at 3 million inhabitants. Roads leading in and out of Korogocho are muddy. Houses are either tin structures with polythene roofs or mud walls or discarded cardboard boxes. Sanitation remains poor while electricity is restricted to streetlights, most of which never work.

Most of the people are self-employed, trading in petty commodities for a slight profit. The employed are mostly casual labourers and have to wake up before dawn to walk about eight kilometres to work. A significant proportion remains unemployed for long periods. Because of the difficult socio-economic conditions for the majority of these people, coupled with the International Monetary Fund's cost-sharing policy, it has become difficult for parents in such slums to meet the financial demands of the formal school system.

Many drop-outs

"Some 53 per cent of children in Kenya drop out of school every year and thus require reintegration into the education system," says Kalonzo Musyoka, Kenya's Minister of Education.

A survey carried out by Action Aid Kenya in 1992 indicates the problems of the formal education system: one out of four boys and one out of five girls aged between 5 and 15 years living in the Korogocho slum of 60,000 inhabitants were not in school. In order to reach these out-of-school children, the organization decided to set up non-formal education centres. The centres are located in churches, public buildings or makeshift buildings constructed by the local people.

"The centres aim at providing these children with skills, knowledge and attitudes to enable them to engage in gainful employment rather than stay illiterate," says Doris Mwabobia, Programme Coordinator at Action Aid Kenya.

Dressed in tattered clothes, Evaswel Evayo, 14, is busy solving a mathematical problem in a stuffy, makeshift room, with a single window, recently converted into a classroom. Evayo, like other children, has never been to a formal school. "I have come here to learn because my parents could not afford to send me to a formal school," says the young boy whose ambition is to be a pilot.

"Before this programme came into being, we were a desperate lot. Our children remained at home because we could not afford to educate them. Now I am happy because my children are able to go to school and get education like any other child," says Lucy Wanjiru, a villager.

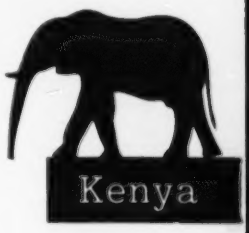
Flexible schooling

"This programme has been made flexible to allow these learners to study in the morning and attend to other family chores in the afternoon," says Jennifer Otin, the head teacher at the school, adding: "We also allow them to come to school without uniforms because most families cannot afford them."

The teachers at the centre are volunteers from the slum and are identified by village education committees. "The teachers are not employees of Action Aid Kenya and are therefore paid only a small honorarium by parents and the school committee," says Concepta Mwachi, another member of Action Aid Kenya.

Pupils studying in the non-formal centres attend classes for a maximum of four years after which they join formal schools or vocational training centres. During the four years they are taught English, Kiiswahili, vernacular language, mathematics and environmental education. The programme integrates arts, crafts and science in the curriculum to ensure learners grasp important concepts and skills. The number of subjects is lower than in the formal schools because the centres operate for only four hours a day.

There are currently over 1,500 children in forty-five centres in eight villages in Kariobangi. "Our pupils pay between Ksh60-100 (US$1 -1.80) a child per month. This money goes into supplementing the teachers' pay and buying chalk. Unfortunately, there are still many children who stay at home because their parents cannot pay this amount," regrets Otin. ■



Geographical situation:
Eastern Africa
Area:
580,367 km²
Population:
28.4 million
Life expectancy:
55 years
Population growth rate:
3.2% per year
GNP per capita:
US$280
Illiteracy rate:
21.9%
Public expenditure on education:
16.1% of total government expenditure

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In Morocco not all children are yet guaranteed the right to education. Even those who do benefit from this unequal system face problems, reports Malika-Bouchra Basrhir of the Institut Supérieur de l'Information et de la Communication.

When education gets lost in words

Geographical situation: Northern Africa
Area: 446,550 km²
Population: 27.5 million
Life expectancy: 67 years
Population growth rate: 2.1% per year
GNP per capita: US$1110
Illiteracy rate: 56.3%
Public expenditure on education: 22.6% of total government expenditure

Education is an investment: the results become apparent in the long term. But in Morocco it is an area that has failed to live up to official rhetoric.

So in spite of high spending on education, which accounts for more than 20 per cent of total state spending and 5.8 per cent of GNP, the current situation is far from satisfactory. The system has failed to produce the hoped-for results, especially for women and in rural areas. Although the percentage of illiterate people has fallen by 10 points in the past twelve years, it nevertheless remains high, at 55 per cent overall. The rate for women is much higher, at 68 per cent, and three-quarters of those unable to read and write live in the countryside.

It is difficult to have a frank and open discussion about education. It is a subject where groups have entrenched points of view, an issue that arouses social conflict. It lends itself easily to the taking up of ideological positions and the debate can be overwhelmed by political and moral considerations.

Diagnosis of problems needed

The fact also has to be faced that education does not benefit from the status of an academically recognized discipline and has no independent standing as a specialist subject. As a result, research into problems of education takes place in a strictly academic environment (for example, as the subject of a thesis) or as an administrative exercise (for example, specific periodic enquiries). Or else it takes place in an unstructured and informal framework.

In any event, the outcome is that the findings of research remain largely unknown to the academic community. The answer would be to set up a series of studies closely focused on educational needs and properly endowed with the proper diagnostic tools to analyse the nature of problems.

What is being done to improve the situation? The Ministry of Education in Morocco has mounted publicity and media campaigns to inform and advise people about the importance of schooling. The targets of these campaigns are parents living in the countryside and the aim is to alert people to the risks of illiteracy and the damage it does to economic development.

The chief problems faced by rural schools in Morocco arise from water and power. Only 20 per cent are close to a water supply; an even smaller proportion has electricity. This makes conditions difficult for teachers and pupils and contributes to a high level of truancy.

Increasingly the policy of establishing rudimentary schools in as many regions as possible is coming under review. There is a move towards a new strategy that emphasizes the quality of schools rather than their number. It also seeks to give the school a more predominant role in community development and to increase attendance rates.

Corporal punishment

The Moroccan education system is further handicapped by a restrictive approach that prevents the development of both pupils and teachers. The curriculum has little to do with ordinary life. The consequences include high drop-out rates, a substantial level of repeating classes and psychological problems. As the distinguished psychologist A. A. Msefer has said, "the Moroccan school system is too dry and unattractive."

Social attitudes are also a major factor. Those parents who do understand how important education is tend to adopt the old maxim that "schoolmasters kill the children and the parents bury them." As a result relations between Moroccan pupils and their teachers are based on force and submission. Corporal punishment and severe punishment are the daily lot of Moroccan schoolchildren.

Pupils attending their first classes in primary schools in the city of Rabat confirm this image. "The teacher utters cries that make us shake with terror. He moves among the desks with a wooden or steel stick in his hand, occasionally slapping the head of pupils without them knowing why or daring to ask him," said one of the pupils interviewed.

To which the teachers reply that their own position is not especially enviable and their salary low and subject to variation.

So it is essential to make primary-school teachers understand they need to use techniques and methods that will help them know their pupils better. They also need to be able to assess their own role in playing an effective part in drawing up the curriculum. ■

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CHARITY GIVES HOPE FOR PUPILS IN CHINA

Education in the poor regions of China has aroused the concern of people in Hong Kong. Non-governmental organizations are mushrooming and they all want to help improve China's education system, reports Samantha Wong of the Chinese University of Hong Kong.

Education is not taken for granted in China. The educational problems in poor regions such as Guangxi, Yunnan and Guizhou in the south-western and the north-western provinces of China have especially drawn the attention of more affluent compatriots living in Hong Kong.

In these remote and mountainous regions, pupils often drop out of schools owing to poverty. The natural environment is not favourable for farming, which greatly affects the livelihood of the large peasant population.

Clement Lam Ming Cheung, who is active in the China Development and Services Fund, a non-governmental organization in Hong Kong, explains: "China now has a nine-year compulsory education programme. Pupils need not pay school fees, but they have to pay for their books and miscellaneous expenses. However, in villages where poverty prevails, people cannot afford to let their children go to school. Children are required to undertake farm duties and household chores."

Lack of teachers

According to Lam, some areas also face shortages of teachers. "Teachers trained in one area will be assigned to teach there, so if few teachers choose to be trained in rural areas, there will not be enough teachers," he said, adding, "some teachers do not want to teach in rural areas because of the low salary."

The lack of schools and teaching facilities is another problem in remote mountainous areas. And often there is also a shortage of textbooks.

In order to help China improve its education system, charities in Hong Kong have initiated various plans. The Association for Promoting Education in China, an organization composed of volunteers from different professions, organizes visits to the poor remote and mountainous regions. "During the visits we bring with us some stationery, dictionaries and blackboards," says Stanley Lee Yat On, Vice Chairman of the association. "However, our support is not only a matter of providing materials. We also want to show our concern."

He hopes that the visits will sow seeds for sustainable development in the poor regions and make children there curious so that they begin to explore the outside world.

Help to rebuild schools

The China Development and Services Fund organizes visits to remote areas, subsidizes poor students and provides teaching materials to schools. Lam, who participates in these activities, explains that the school buildings in some villages are in a bad state of repair. "The roof may collapse or rain may leak in. We help them to repair or rebuild the schools," he says.

Another charitable organization is the World Vision International, which has launched educational campaigns in China. Its specific concern is girls. According to a report on education in China, published by the China Education Committee of the Hong Kong University Student Union, the enrolment and the drop-out rates of girls are higher than those of boys.

"We hold girl literacy classes and build schools for girls to encourage them to go to school," said Phoebe Lai Yuet Sim, of the China Office of World Vision International. "Moreover, when providing educational subsidies and scholarships, we give the priority to girls."

For instance, in Guyuan county in Ningxia, World Vision International provides basic education to girls. Needlework and farming with technological means are taught in the schools simultaneously, allowing the girls to make their own living in the future. Orphans, children with special needs and children living in disaster-affected areas are other target groups of the organization.

Courses for adults

While many organizations concentrate their help on education for children, World Vision International has also launched adult education projects. "We noticed that the illiteracy rate of women is high in poor regions. Moreover, we find that people who are forced to quit their studies because of poverty often become illiterate again. Thus, we hold literacy classes at night for adults," Lai says. "They are taught simple calculations so that they will not be cheated in trade, as well as knowledge and vocabulary related to agriculture and everyday life."

The efforts of the different organizations in Hong Kong contribute to a rise in the number of children receiving primary school education. According to the Educational Statistics Yearbook of China 1995, the net enrolment rate of school-age children rose from 85 per cent in 1965 to 98.5 per cent in 1995, in spite of relatively low promotion rates of junior and senior secondary school graduates.

Although the work of the organizations varies their final aim is to help the people shed their life of poverty and eventually lead a better life relying on their own means.

They all hope that their help will pave the way for the future development of China. ■

China

Geographical situation: East Asia
Area: 9,596,961 km²
Population: 1.2 billion
Life expectancy: 70 years
Population growth rate: 1.3% per year
GNP per capita: US$620
Illiteracy rate: 18.5%
Public expenditure on education: 12.2% of total government expenditure

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COPING WITH ILLITERACY IN POST-WAR MOZAMBIQUE

Destroyed by sixteen years of civil war, the education sector in Mozambique continues to be underdeveloped. Some 60 per cent of the population are illiterate and half of all children are out of school, reports Gabriel Cezinando of the School of Journalism in Maputo.

Geographical situation: Southern Africa
Area: 801,590 km²
Population: 18.3 million
Life expectancy: 47 years
Population growth rate: 2.5% per year
GNP per capita: US$80
Illiteracy rate: 59.9%
Public expenditure on education: 12% of total government expenditure

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The war that destroyed Mozambique between 1976 and 1992 is the principal reason for the educational problems facing the country today.

Although the universal right to education became law after independence in 1975, the civil war hindered progress and the number of illiterates continued to increase. Today, Mozambique has the second highest illiteracy rate in Southern Africa.

Arlindo Sambo of the National Institute for Educational Development explains that the education system throughout the country was paralysed owing to the rural exodus during the war. "This made the literacy rate decrease. A lot of children and adults simply ceased to study," Sambo says. "The war obliged people to change their life-styles. They had to earn money in order to survive or help their parents back home. School became a last priority."

Weather hits classes

Another important factor responsible for the low educational quality is the lack of learning materials. Most pupils do not have the financial possibilities to buy books. "To solve this problem the government decided after the war to distribute free textbooks and I think that in a few years the problem will be solved," says Sambo.

He adds that the bad conditions of classrooms are also an important factor to explain the low performance of pupils. "They sit on the ground under trees where it is difficult to use materials such as a ruler," he says. Sometimes the weather conditions jeopardize the classes.

Attempts are being made to change the situation. The government has elaborated a plan for achieving education for all children before the year 2000. This plan, however, will not reach its goal, Sambo explains, because the availability of schools is unevenly distributed throughout the country.

"There are schools in rural areas with few pupils. The first thing to do is to bring the children from the cities back to the villages where they came from," Sambo says.

The conditions of teachers also leave much to be desired, according to Sambo. "They do not have the necessary teaching materials and try to cope with the situation as they can," he says. Another concern is teachers' salaries. "Today, teachers are starting to become the pupils' employees and they do not resist temptations," comments Sambo. "Teachers are therefore losing their recognition in society. How to valorize teachers more is a task for the Minister of Education to deal with," he says.

New initiatives

Today, new initiatives are mushrooming. The Mozambican government has established night classes for adults who are often accompanied by young people and children also wanting to learn. The problem is that teachers are often not well trained and many adults do not get much out of the classes.

One solution proposed by the Ministry of Education is a new literacy curriculum for adults and under-privileged children. They are taught in their local languages and Portuguese is only introduced at a later stage. This project, called the Belingue, is now at the experimental stage. Bartolomeo Balate of the Ministry of Education says that learning materials have been developed and tested in six languages: Sena, Tsonga, Emacua, Nhanja, Ndau and Kimwane.

"Everything is ready. Now we only need to find the US$80,000 necessary to distribute the materials and train teachers," Balate says. The project will benefit some 1 million people and teachers will be recruited from the local communities.

Local librairies

Another solution to increase the literacy level is the creation of some 300 libraries throughout the country. "Each district must have one library so that a good number of the literate population have the opportunity to consult and read books," Balate says. The objective is to get the illiteracy rate down from 59.5 to 50 per cent in the four years to come.

The latest major project of the Mozambican government is a revision of the existing curriculum of primary education. The Ministry of Education, in collaboration with the National Institute for Educational Development, has developed a new curriculum that focuses on the daily life and needs of pupils. The aim is to give the children knowledge about the region in which they live and to prepare them for their future lives. "The project includes pupils from all regions and social classes," Balate says. "It has already started and the results are good." ■

A school in search of an identity

Burkina Faso's school system was based on the French model and introduced a little over a century ago. Devised for training public officials, now it also produces unemployed youth and no longer meets the needs of the population, reports Marceline Ilboudo of the Centre Interafricain d'études en radio-rurale in Ouagadougou.

Originally set up to train colonial administrative assistants, Burkina Faso's schools have hardly shifted from their unwieldy 'vocation'. You go to school to become a civil servant.

Under the Structural Adjustment Programme, public service recruitment is fixed by quota. And although the government of Burkina Faso has put into operation some sweeping reforms, including increased educational provision, improved teacher training and free distribution of books, the lack of teachers continues to hamper real progress.

Preschool education is available only in the towns. A mere 0.82 per cent of the infant population can take advantage of it. The demand for primary education is increasing although parents in rural areas continue to be reluctant to send their children, especially their daughters, to school.

One reason, says teacher Raphael Hien, is that "the only workforce the peasants have is their children. That is why they keep them back to do agricultural work and look after livestock, which constitute their source of income." Another teacher explains: "The cost of schooling puts off some parents from educating their children. When enrolment time comes we sometimes have to go round from door to door to convince parents to send their children to school." The situation is often made worse by a series of bad harvests.

Once a child is signed on at school he or she has to be fed and textbooks, pencils and other materials have to be bought. School canteens, which used to provide many services, have been run down or closed.

One teacher for 180 children

However, the opposite problem occurs in the towns, where school rolls are excessive. "In Ouagadougou we counted 180 pupils in a single class with 1 teacher," admitted a ministry official responsible for education. The attendance rate in the capital Ouagadougou is 82 per cent, compared with nearly 9 per cent in Bogandé, 300 kilometres to the east. Nationally, the rate is 38.5 per cent.

Few girls go to school, for sociological reasons. Kadiatou Korsaga, who is responsible for promoting girls' education in the Ministry of Education, recommends such measures as involving mothers, giving priority to recruitment of female teachers, awarding grants and making school supplies free of charge.

Secondary education remains concentrated in urban centres and most secondary schools are in the private sector. Out of 100 enrolments in Grade 6, the first secondary year, only 25 reach Grade 9 three years later. Hardly 10 will go to university and only 1 or 2 will be able to claim, at the end of their studies, a salaried position in the civil service, formerly the biggest employer. "I don't understand it," says a peasant, "my son has obtained all his qualifications, but he has no work and he doesn't know how to do anything else."

Technical education has hardly been developed at all, and only 6 per cent of pupils follow it. Adult education, started after independence in 1960, is progressing slowly. The literacy rate has risen from 3 per cent overall in 1961, to 10 per cent today in the countryside and 48 per cent in the towns.

Finding new ways of learning

New initiatives try to cope with this difficult reality. One of the most successful is the non-formal education centres and a system of satellite schools that opened for the first time in 1995 for out-of-school children or drop-outs aged between 7 and 15. Ali, who attends classes at the non-formal education centre in Korsimoro, is delighted. "I'm going to learn to read and write, and even be able to watch television."

Another fruitful initiative is training courses for adults in French and in the local language that combine expertise with learning to cope with life, according to local demands and circumstances.

Maimounata Sanou, a vegetable seller, speaks from personal experience. "I followed reading and writing courses in Dioula, which helped me run my business better," she said.

The authorities are continuously introducing changes into the education system. Merging two classes or teaching different ages together are currently ways of solving the problem of catering for large numbers of pupils. Junior and senior high schools specialized in such areas as agriculture and breeding livestock are soon to be set up to match learning skills with the job market.

In addition to the University of Ouagadougou there are two other higher education institutions, the Polytechnique Université of Bobo Dioulasso and the École normale supérieure of Koudougou.

Despite these advances, two-thirds of children and adults do not know how to read or write in any language in Burkina Faso. That is a disadvantage that slows down all development. ■

Burkina Faso

Geographical situation: West Africa
Area: 274 000 km²
Population: 11.1 million
Life expectancy: 46 years
Population growth rate: 2.9% per year
GNP per capita: US$230
Illiteracy rate: 80.8%
Public expenditure on education: 11.1% of total government expenditure

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International Journalism Competition on the Right to Education

Prizewinners

Ms Samali T. Nyanzi
Uganda Management Institute
Uganda

Ms N.C. Krishna Priya

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Ms Karina Vladimirovna Chupina
Faculty of Journalism
St Petersburg State University
The Russian Federation

3RD PRIZE:

Mr Alexey Kompaniychenko
Faculty of Journalism
St Petersburg State University
The Russian Federation

4TH PRIZE:

Ms Surya Malik
Lady Shri Ram College, New Delhi
India

5TH PRIZE:

Mr Alex Diang'a
School of Journalism
University of Nairobi
Kenya

6TH PRIZE:

Mr Ademola Idowu
Nigerian Institute of Journalism
Nigeria

7TH PRIZE:

Ms Samantha Wong
Department of Journalism
The Chinese University
of Hong Kong
China

8TH PRIZE:

Ms Heidy Anette Rueckert de Hoyos
and
Mr Alan Christian de la Rosa Palacio
Universidad de Monterrey
Mexico

9TH PRIZE:

Ms Mariz Sheila Tito
College of Mass Communication
University of the Philippines
The Philippines

10TH PRIZE:

Ms Malika-Bouchra Bashrir
Institut Supérieur de l'Information
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Morocco

11TH PRIZE:

Ms Olja Stojanova
Faculty of Journalism and
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12TH PRIZE:

Ms Marceline Ilboudo
Centre International d'Etudes
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en Afrique de la Province
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Burkina Faso

13TH PRIZE:

Mr Peter K. Ndirangu
Kenya Institute of Mass
Communication
Kenya

14TH PRIZE:

Mr Gabriel Cezimando
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Universidad de Costa Rica
Escuela de Ciencias de la
Comunicación Colectiva
Universidad de Costa Rica
Costa Rica

16TH PRIZE:

Mr Luke Njeru Nyaga
Kenya Institute of Mass
Communication
Kenya

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The International Consultative Forum on Education for All

The International Consultative Forum on Education for All, or the EFA Forum, as it is generally known, is a coalition of agencies and specialists that keeps basic education high on the world's political agenda. It was set up after the World Conference on Education for All in 1990 to guide follow-up action and provide a forum for continuous consultation among governments and their partners. Its goal? To expand and improve the provision of basic education in order to meet the basic learning needs of all children, youth and adults.

The EFA Forum is sponsored by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and the World Bank, as well as several bilateral donor agencies.

The Forum's programme is decided by an international steering committee that meets at least once a year and the programme is carried out largely by the EFA Forum Secretariat, based at UNESCO's headquarters in Paris.

The EFA Forum global meetings bring together key decision-makers, education experts, specialists from donor and international agencies, non-governmental organizations and the media. Forum meetings have been held in Paris (1991), New Delhi (1993) and Amman (1996).

The Forum's main activity at present is the EFA 2000 Assessment, a worldwide exercise to assess the progress made in basic education during the 1990s. The Assessment will reach its high point in April 2000 when the international community will meet at the World Education Forum.

The Forum also publishes the quarterly *EFA 2000 Bulletin*, and a series of topical reports, *Education for All: Status and Trends*, on key aspects of basic education, as well as occasional brochures and documents.

Its information service now includes an Internet website, including *inter alia* all its publications and current EFA events. The EFA Forum is also sponsoring the setting up of regional networks of journalists to improve media coverage of EFA issues.

THE INTERNATIONAL CONSULTATIVE FORUM ON EDUCATION FOR ALL

EFA FORUM Secretariat, UNESCO
7 Place de Fontenoy
75352 Paris 07 SP, France

Tel: +33 1 45 68 08 35
Fax: +33 1 45 68 56 29
E-mail: efa@unesco.org
Internet:
http://www.education.unesco.org/efa

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Education — a Right or a Privilege?

On the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1998, students in more than **400 schools** of journalism **around the world** were invited to write articles or take photographs that illustrate the right to education.

This magazine features the **eighteen winning articles** and **photographs** which provide a vivid picture of the wide gap between the right to education and reality.

The articles **report on the educational needs** and aspirations of slum-dwellers in Uganda, on the **deplorable conditions** of state schools in the post-perestroika Russian Federation, on the **battle against illiteracy** in India, on the consequences of cost-sharing policies in Kenya, on the **harsh realities** of street children in Mexico and much more.

The leitmotif is, as **Samali T. Nyanzi** of the Uganda Management Institute writes in the winning article: "We should all have **the right to education.** Being illiterate is a serious handicap. One's vision becomes limited."

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